

## [The Mayor]

Men Against Granite

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Recorded In

Writers' Section Files

DATE: JUL 29 [?]

THE MAYOR

The office was overheated and dingy, with law books stacked ceiling-high along the walls. The afternoon light was a dim blur through the two windows and the noises of Main Street rose vague and discordant. The man behind the littered desk was surprisingly young-looking, pleasant-faced with a grave assured manner. His sandy hair was in slight disorder, but his voice had a calm confidence. His father had been the mayor, when Barre was having growing pains. He had followed in his father's footsteps — Dartmouth, law school, and the mayorship. Liberal, progressive and broad-minded, you instinctively knew that he would be at home with any class of people, as friendly toward the man in the streets as to the man in the bank president's chair.

"The story of Barre granite," he mused. "Which side is it you want? the proletarian or the bourgeoisie? Yes, of course you want both sides if you want the true picture..."

From time to time as Mayor Duncon talked he extracted and lit a cigarette from a crumpled pack. Occasionally there was an out-cropping of dry whimsical humor. One could see the pages turn in the Book of Barre, settlement, growth and industry, social and civic history, as he mentioned stiff-necked Yankees, money-grubbing landowners, the methods of

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big business, the foreign influx through the decades , and the arbiters of D. A. R. “ The Scotch and Italians ,” he said came to Barre about the same time, around 1895. All skilled workers. Some of the hand-carvers were real artists. Now there probably aren't more than a dozen-or-so hand-carvers left here. And nobody to replace them when they're gone. Modern machinery had done away with them. Talk to Ardini, the statue-cutter, about that phase of it. He 2 was a good man, did some very fine-work, but machinery put him out of the picture completely. Naturally he's bitter about it — likes to talk about it. He's 80-years old now but still able-bodied, strong enough to go out and do his day's work. “ Practically all the Italians came from northern Italy. A higher class by far than the southern Italians you find in Massachusetts and New York. And they're very scornful of the southerners - considers themselves superior in every way. The older people still speak Italian almost exclusively. But their children have grown away from it, became Americanized. Many of the second generation speak little or no Italian at all. There has been a good deal of inter-marriage between the Italians and Scotch of the younger generation. And of course both have inter-married with native Yankee stock to some extent. Among the other races there has been less mingling. In general the Italians are indifferent to organized religion. Some of the women remain faithful but the man have drifted away from it. “ The Spanish element came from the quarries of northern Spain — Santander. The Swedes have perhaps been best assimilated into community life — adapted themselves more rapidly and entirely. There are some Syrians, mostly shop-keepers. And tighter than Yankee trader. “ Roughly Barre is divided into two sections. The foreign element at the north end, the natives at the south. The division at Depot Square down here is known as “The Deadline.” Some of the foreigners have lost caste with their own people by moving up to the south side, [trying?] to become completely American and sever all ties with their own race. This is resented by people rightfully proud of their nationality. 3 “ The Italians are anti-Fascist but pro-Italian if you see what I mean. That is, they are opposed to Mussolini's internal policies, but they are strongly Italian when it comes to international affairs. They are proud of and loyal to Italy even while they condemn Mussolini over their wine and grappa. There was a lot of feeling here over the war in Spain, and it was almost one hundred percent Loyalist. This

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spring about 30 Spanish refugees arrived here and went into hiding. But the Customs Officers came and routed them out. Father Lobo was here — a priest with Loyalist sympathies, and that was bad over there. He was too well known and I think his presence here led to the overtaking of them all. I got myself in bad with the local clergy by calling on the Father — a fine man. “ It's too bad some of the old-time granite men aren't left. They were real men in those days. Old Jim Revise up on the hill, and old Jim Carwell, the hard-boiled railroad engineer who came here with nothing and built up a fortune. Old Jim Carwell was a character, stewed to the gills all the time, [cursing?] and swearing wherever he was, ready to put his money on the line for fight or fun. Rough and ready, two-fisted he-man fighters, they were the ones who built up the fortunes that the second generation is spending today. There are all kinds of legends about them, and men in the industry still talk of the two old [Jims?]... “ Modern machinery came in and silicosis slaughtered family after family — through ruthlessness of big industry. The safety devices now are far from perfect. In fact it will be ten or twenty years before they are right. And they come too late to save the men who worked in the sheds before. That dust is already in their lungs... Even if they leave the sheds, as many of them do, the damage is done. It will get them. Some go fast and others linger on for years. 4 “ Some of the workers are fatalistic and reckless about it. They brush off their stones instead of wetting them down... But you cannot blame them for scorning the first safety devices. Those masks were terrible. When a man began to sweat they clogged with dust. Before long he was panting for breath. No wonder the men tore them off and throw them away. And the earliest vacuums hampered a man's work. They're better now, they interfere less and suck up as much dust — but they still leave a lot to be desired. “ The young men today don't go into the sheds. They've seen too much of what it does to their fathers. They've seen too many funerals in the family. And they know what caused those funerals. They got away from Barre if they can. It used to be easy for a young man to go away and get work. How many of them just hang around and pick up what odd-jobs they can get. Financial pressure of course forces a few of them to go into the sheds. But most of them will do anything to keep away from it. Our beautiful cemeteries are full of stone cutters who died in the prime of life — the thirties

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and forties. “ Granite-cutters, especially in the old boom days, were a migratory lot. They'd go from Barre to Quincy, up into New Hampshire, over into Maine. Or they'd drift south to Georgia or float out west to Minnesota. The southern granite industry was developed by Barre stonecutters, you might say. They were a restless, hard-bitten crew, earning good money fast, spending it even faster, living life to the hilt — because they know inside that it would be short. “ Now the manufacturers are all deeply indebted to the quarry owners, if they are doing any business at all. They have to have the stone to produce monuments, and they have to produce monuments before they can pay for the stone. So they get trusted for the stone, and their debt increases gradually as the payments lag. It's a vicious circle... 5 There are several things entering into the fact that the granite workers have not been exploited by the employers, the way the Rutland marble workers have been enslaved under the consolidation the Proctors welded together. The granite companies have remained independent for the most part. Many of the owners rose from the ranks of labor, that is one factor. Naturally they have more sympathy and understanding with their employees. Again the Union has always been strong here. Another item is that granite is sold in smaller quantities than marble. As a result Barre granite has [remained?] comparatively free from the evils that exist in the marble industry. “ There was a bad strike in 1921. That's when they brought the French-Canadians in to break it up. They marched 500 of them through this Main Street with bands, flags and placards. That left a bad taste and to this day a strong resentment is felt toward the French workers. There are stone-cutters who haven't had a day's work since that time. One old Scotchman refuses to step foot near quarries or sheds since the French-Canadians came in. Feeling was very bitter and rife and it has lasted these 18 years. The Canucks have never been accepted by the community. “ Of course the first immigrants from Scotland and Italy were not accepted by the natives either. But they did not ask or need to be. They came in such numbers they were a force in themselves. They were highly skilled workers, proud of their trader proud of their background with its ancient culture and heritage. And they transformed a sleepy little farming community into a booming industrial town. It must have been quite a thing to-watch. the transition was so abrupt and extreme. Like a mining town that mushrooms

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overnight. You can imagine the horror of the staid Yankee farmers at such an invasion and the hectic brawling atmosphere that inevitably followed. “ The Scottish clans were strong for some time. The Gordon clan still exists, has regular meetings, and so forth — but the life has gone out of it. There was a Burns Club that was very active, too, but that died also. “

Mayor Duncon lit another cigarette with his left hand, and went on to list with deliberate care the men who would be good informants on the different racial groups that have contributed to Barre granite. He smiled slightly as he said: “But don't tell him you know me. Ever since that Catholic school business he and I don't jibe.” Then he was quite grave in saying: “She's a D. A. R., but she's a very nice type of woman...” “ The depression saved Barre from the fate of Rutland marble. The big money interests were working in, spreading their tentacles toward monopoly. But they just got started when the depression hit them and knocked them out. Monopoly is again on the increase through the absorbing of smaller companies. The trend is in that direction without a doubt. Well, it's happened all over the country. I suppose it's too much to hope it can't happen here... “

The Mayor stood up and thoughtfully turned to the windows overlooking the Main Street of his town. “There's an old lady in that house over there,” he said, pointing to a gable-end brick structure of Georgian architecture with a fanlight over the entrance. It looked out-of-place on that busy street crowded with office buildings, department stores, gasoline stations, and beer taverns. But it held a grave dignity and pride in the midst of rude confusion. The time-stained brick house belonged to a more gracious era.

“Her father came here about [?] 1840[?] and built that house. For some ( [?] 80) years she has been sitting there in the old family home in the heart of Barre. She refuses to leave it. She's been offered as much as \$100,000 for the property. From those windows she has seen Barre grow from a little rural frontier village to what it is today. “ The Mayor was

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thoughtful as he stared across the raucous traffic of Main Street at the faded brick house.  
“Yes, she could tell you what granite has done to Barre — if she wanted to talk about it.”